

SLPAB's Speech-Language Pathology Assistant (SLPA) Frequently Asked Questions

1. What are Speech-Language Pathology Assistants (SLPAs)?

SLPAs are support-level personnel registered (licensed) by the State of California's Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology Board (SLPAB) to provide speech and language services under the supervision of a licensed or credentialed speech-language pathologist.

2. What are the requirements to become a registered SLPA?

To become a registered SLPA, an individual must have completed formal academic and clinical training or may have earned the requisite degree and possess the equivalent work experience as follows:

- SLPA associate of arts or sciences degree program approved by the Board.*
- Equivalent SLPA degree program (out-of-state training) as approved by the Board.*
- Bachelor's degree program in Speech-Language Pathology or Communicative Sciences program or an SLPA program.*
- Possession of a Bachelor's degree as referenced above and nine-months of full-time work experience performing duties consistent with that of authorized for a SLPA.*

3. Why was the category of SLPAs created in California?

Support personnel in the profession of speech-language pathology (SLP) have existed nationwide for more than 30 years. However, the movement to implement a uniform training and credentialing standard for SLPAs became a topic of interest with the national professional certification body, the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), in early 2000, when the SLP profession sought out ways to expand the delivery of services. ASHA created

model training guidelines to assist training institutions with developing SLPA curricula and clinical instruction. In California, the State professional association, the California Speech-Language-Hearing Association (CSHA), viewed the creation of the SLPA as a way to help alleviate the State's shortage of SLP services to consumers. Demographic research conducted by CSHA revealed that the shortage would reach a crisis in the mid-2000s due to the retirement of many SLPs and the growing demand for SLP services with school-aged children and the aging population. CSHA sponsored legislation in 1998 to create the new support personnel category-SLPA.

4. Why is State oversight of SLPAs necessary?

Since the use and training of support-level personnel for the delivery of SLP services were not standardized from state to state, it was important for California to implement training, supervision, and service standards to provide adequate guidance to the profession and to protect the public from potential misuse of SLPAs.

5. What is the difference between an SLPA and a speech-language pathology aide?

SLP aides, like SLPAs, are support-level personnel who provide assistance under the supervision of a licensed or credentialed SLP. However, unlike SLPAs, aides are not required to possess formal academic or clinical training through approved training institutions and, as such, have much more restrictive operating parameters. Aides operating under the SLPAB's laws and regulations [CCR Section 1399.154-1399.154.7], must be directly supervised; the supervising SLP must be physically present at all times while the aide is performing SLP duties. Conversely, an SLPA may operate under different levels of supervision depending upon the delegated tasks and the medical status of the client/patient. (See Question 7 on supervision parameters.)

In addition, the settings and legal authority for the use of aides is different. Public schools use aides under the governing provisions of the California Education Code [CCR Title 5 Section 3051.1(4)(c)] which authorizes the use of aides under the direct supervision of a credentialed language, speech, and hearing specialist, if specified in the individualized education program. The provision further states that no more than two aides may be supervised by one credentialed specialist and that the caseloads of the credentialed personnel may not be increased by the use of an aide. Alternately, SLPAs are governed under the Business and Professions Code (B&P) by the SLPAB regardless of the work setting.

6. Are there provisions for SLPAs to work in the public school setting?

Yes, SLPAs may work in public schools as “related services” under the California Education Code Section 56363. Related services include language and speech development and remediation services that may be provided by an SLPA as defined in B&P Section 2530.2(f).

7. What type of supervision does the SLPA work under?

SLPAs work under different levels of supervision depending upon the task being performed, the health care needs of the client/patient, and the experience of the SLPA. The levels of supervision are categorized as immediate, direct, and indirect. CCR Section 1399.170.2 outlines the supervision parameters as follows:

(a) Duties performed by the SLPA that require immediate supervision may include, but are not limited to, any direct client activity involving medically fragile patients. In such instances, the SLPA shall act only under the direction of the supervisor.

(b) Duties performed by the SLPA that require direct supervision may include, but are not limited to, any new screening or treatment activity that the assistant has been trained

to perform by the supervisor, but has not yet been performed by the SLPA in direct client care.

(c) Duties performed by the SLPA that require indirect supervision may include, but are not limited to, the following:

(1) Screening or treatment activities where the supervisor has previously given instructions as to how to perform the task, has observed the assistant in the conduct of these activities, and is satisfied that the activities can be competently performed by the SLPA; i.e., repetitive drill exercises, generalization or carryover activities;

(2) Clerical tasks such as record keeping, materials preparation, scheduling, equipment maintenance; and,

(3) Other non-client care activities.

8. Who is legally responsible for the duties performed by the SLPA?

The SLPA's supervisor shall be accountable and legally responsible for the actions and inactions of the SLPA during the performance of his or her duties.

9. What duties may an SLPA perform under the law?

The SLPA may perform support-level activities as provided under B&P Code Section 2538.1 (4):

The scope of responsibility, duties, and functions of SLPAs shall include, but not be limited to, all of the following:

(A) Conducting speech-language screening, without interpretation, and using screening protocols developed by the supervising speech-language pathologist.

(B) Providing direct treatment assistance to patients or clients under the supervision of a speech-language pathologist.

- (C) Following and implementing documented treatment plans or protocols developed by a supervising speech-language pathologist.*
- (D) Documenting patient or client progress toward meeting established objectives, and reporting the information to a supervising speech-language pathologist.*
- (E) Assisting a speech-language pathologist during assessments, including, but not limited to, assisting with formal documentation, preparing materials, and performing clerical duties for a supervising speech-language pathologist.*
- (F) When competent to do so, as determined by the supervising speech-language pathologist, acting as an interpreter for non-English-speaking patients or clients and their family members.*
- (G) Scheduling activities and preparing charts, records, graphs, and data.*
- (H) Performing checks and maintenance of equipment, including, but not limited to, augmentative communication devices.*
- (I) Assisting with speech-language pathology research projects, in-service training, and family or community education.*

In addition to these duties, the Board has determined that routine feeding activities, such as those provided by family members, caregivers, and other certified personnel, may be safely administered by SLPAs. Routine feeding activities are not considered part of formal evaluations or diagnostic procedures.

10. What duties are considered outside the scope of responsibility of the SLPA?

SLPAs are not authorized to conduct evaluations, interpret data, alter treatment plans, or perform any task without the express knowledge and approval of his or her supervisor [B&P

Section 2538.1.] In addition, the following tasks are considered outside the scope of responsibility of an SLPA:

- (a) Participating in parent conferences, case conferences, or interdisciplinary team conferences without the supervising speech-language pathologist or another speech-language pathologist being present;*
- (b) Providing counseling or advice to a client/patient or his or her parent or guardian which is beyond the scope of the client/patient's treatment;*
- (c) Signing any documents in lieu of the supervising speech-language pathologist; i.e., treatment plans, client reimbursement forms, or formal reports;*
- (d) Discharging a client/patient from services;*
- (e) Making referrals for additional services;*
- (f) Unless required by law, disclosing confidential information either orally or in writing to anyone not designated by the supervising speech-language pathologist;*
- (g) Representing himself or herself as a speech-language pathologist; and,*
- (h) Performing procedures that require a high level of clinical acumen and technical skill; i.e., vocal tract prosthesis shaping or fitting, vocal tract imaging, and oropharyngeal swallow therapy with bolus material.*

11. What qualifications must a SLP have in order to supervise an SLPA?

Under the law, a SLPA supervisor must hold a valid and clear license issued by the SLPAB, or if employed by a public school, may hold a valid and current professional clear, clear, or life clinical or rehabilitative services credential in language, speech, and hearing issued by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing. The SLPA supervisor is required to complete no less than six hours of continuing professional development in supervision training within the initial two years of assuming the supervisory role, and must complete a minimum of three hours

of supervision training every two years thereafter. For further information regarding the course content requirements for supervision training, please refer to CCR Section 1399.170.15 (b)(4).

12. What are the responsibilities of the SLPA supervisor?

The SLPA supervisor is responsible for designing and implementing a supervisory plan that protects client/patient care and maintains the highest possible standards of quality. The amount and type of supervision required should be consistent with the skills and experience of the SLPA, the needs of the client/patient, the service setting, the tasks assigned, and the laws and regulations that govern SLPAs. Treatment of the client/patient remains the responsibility of the supervisor.

- ✓ *Any person supervising a SLPA registered with the SLPAB shall submit, within 30 days of the commencement of such supervision, the “Responsibility Statement for Supervision of a Speech-Language Pathology Assistant,” which requires that:*
- ✓ *The supervisor shall possess and maintain a valid and current California license as a speech-language pathologist as required in B&P Section 2532 and CCR Section 1399.160.3, or may hold a valid and current professional clear, clear, or life clinical or rehabilitative services credential in language, speech, and hearing issued by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing.*
- ✓ *The supervisor shall immediately notify the assistant of any disciplinary action, including revocation, suspension (even if stayed), probation terms, inactive license, or lapse in licensure, that affects the supervisor’s ability or right to supervise.*
- ✓ *The supervisor shall ensure that the extent, kind, and quality of the clinical work performed is consistent with the training and experience of the person being supervised, and shall be accountable for the assigned tasks performed by the SLPA. The supervisor shall review client/patient records, monitor and evaluate assessment*

and treatment decisions of the SLPA, and monitor and evaluate the ability of the assistant to provide services at the site(s) where he or she will be practicing and to the particular clientele being treated, and ensure compliance with all laws and regulations governing the practice of speech-language pathology.

- ✓ *The supervisor knows and understands the laws and regulations pertaining to supervision of SLPAs.*
- ✓ *As the professional development advisor, the supervisor shall assist in the development of a plan for the SLPA to complete 12 hours of continuing professional development every two years through State or regional conferences, workshops, formal in-service presentations, independent study programs, or any combination of these concerning communication disorders.*
- ✓ *The supervisor shall communicate to the SLPA how emergencies will be handled.*
- ✓ *Upon written request of the SLPAB, the supervisor shall provide the SLPAB with any documentation which verifies the supervisor's compliance with the requirements set forth in this article.*

13. How many SLPAs can a SLP supervise?

A supervisor may not supervise more two SLPAs, but may supervise a total of three support personnel, including SLPAs and aides.

14. Are SLPAs required to complete continuing professional development?

Yes, SLPAs must complete at least 12 hours of continuing professional development each two-year renewal period. The 12 hours may be obtained through any of the following venues concerning communication disorders: State or regional conferences, workshops, formal in-service presentations, or independent study programs.

15. Do Medi-Cal, Medicare, or other third-party insurers recognize SLPAs as authorized providers for the purposes of reimbursement?

Currently, both Medi-Cal (State-funded health coverage for those below set incomes) and Medicare (federal health care funding) do not have specific provisions for SLPAs; therefore, reimbursement for services provided by SLPAs is not authorized at this time. Discussions are ongoing and many interested parties are working toward creating provisions for SLPAs under both State and federal reimbursement guidelines.

16. How many approved SLPA programs are there in California?

Currently, there are seven approved SLPA programs in the State; most of them are located in Southern California. However, there is a new SLPA program in development in Northern California (American River College, Sacramento) with an anticipated student enrollment in fall 2007 or spring 2008. For a complete listing of Board-approved SLPA programs, please visit the SLPAB Web site at www.slpab.ca.gov or contact the SLPAB office at (916) 263-2666.

17. If consumers or client/patients have a complaint regarding the services provided by an SLPA or would like to report the inappropriate use of an SLPA, whom should they contact?

All complaints or general concerns regarding SLPA activities or employment issues should be reported to the Board, regardless of the work setting. An individual may file a formal complaint on the complaint form provided on the SLPAB Web site or may contact the SLPAB office at (916) 263-2666 to discuss the matter with a trained staff person to determine the appropriate course of action.